

## ***PEDRA DA MEMÓRIA (MEMORY'S STONE)***

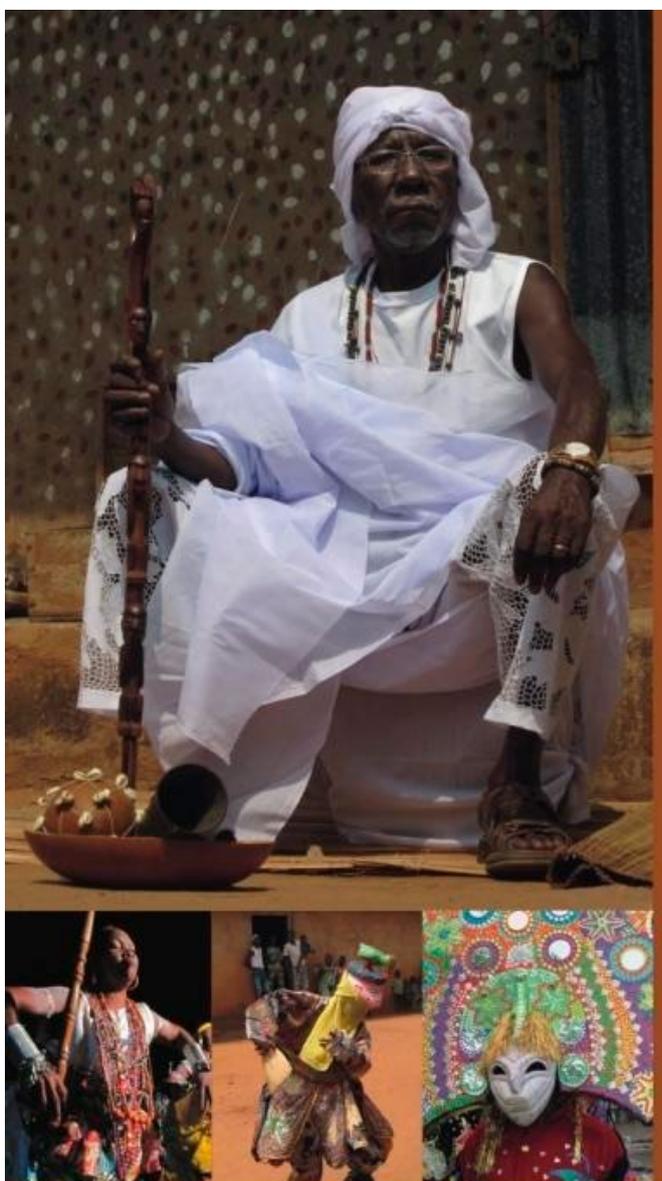
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*Pedra da Memória: Euclides Talabyan, minha universidade é o tempo* (*Memory's Stone: Euclides Talabyan, my university is the Time*), authored by researcher Renata Amaral, was published<sup>1</sup> in 2012 as part of a larger project that also encompasses a documentary film<sup>2</sup> and an exhibition that has travelled throughout several Brazilian cities. A hardcover, multilingual edition (written in Portuguese, English and French), it has a square format (29x29cm), 240 pages and high-quality printing.

The first half of the book brings us a set of introductory texts and a delightful photographic essay where images abound, conducting a narrative revealed in seductive colors and well-made portraits. It sets out a poetic investigation that seeks to identify similarities and distinctions in elements of religious and folk culture in both Benin,<sup>3</sup> a country in Western Africa, and the state of Maranhão in Brazil.

Travelling through the pages, our eyes wander around scenes of traditional Brazilian celebrations such as bumba-boi and maracatu rural, placed beside Beninese rites such as Vodun, Geledé and the cult to Egúngún,<sup>4</sup> which have been photographed across the Atlantic. The visual path offered by the book culminates in the Agudás' festivities, Agudás are descendants of former slaves who had returned to Benin and became part of the country's population. In that country, some elements of Brazilian culture were spread and can now be found in the country's architecture, cuisine, arts, among other cultural elements. The photographic essay is followed by exquisite drawings made by the artist Carybé<sup>5</sup> and accompanied by some loose words and written memories by Euclides Talabyan, who died in 2015. Talabyan was Babalorishá<sup>6</sup> of House Fanti Ashanti, considered one of the most important centers for Afro-Brazilian religious practices in Maranhão, as well as a reference for the jeje-nagô<sup>7</sup> in Brazil.

1. The publication was sponsored by CHESF and had incentives from ProAc SP, the state government through its Secretary of Culture and the Project Ação Cultural 2011.

2. With running time of 58 minutes, the documentary was written and directed by Renata Amaral, with executive production and translation by Brice Sogobossi. It has received the award Interações Estéticas from Fundação Nacional das Artes (Funarte/MinC), and the award for best documentary at the Guarnicê Festival. It was also selected for the competitive exhibition of Festival de Cinema do Recife. Its DVD is also part of the booklet (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSHAKiH6IXI>).

3. Ancient Daomé Kingdom, birthplace of ancestral worshipping traditions, and base of Afro-Brazilian religions.

4. Rites and ceremonies from Africa's West Coast that worship ancestry.

5. That's how Hector Júlio Páride Bernabó (1911-1999), an Argentinian established in Brazil, identified himself, as an artist. His works present strong influence from the city of Salvador, where he lived, and its cultural life.

6. Babalorixá or Babalorishá is a Yoruba language word used as a title given to this culture's priests. In Brazil, it refers to the high priest in Candomblé, Umbanda and Xangô religions. In Yourubá language, baba means father, and the contraction l'Orishá means "of Orishá". That means these priests are called father of Orishás (god-like spirits) which in Portuguese is "pai-de-santo". The male priest of these religions, therefore, are referred to as Pai (father). The equivalent title for women is Ialorixá or Iyalorishá.

7. In 19th century Bahia, different ethnic groups brought to Brazil slaves were organized into different groups/nations such as Jeje and Nagô. They ended up forging a new religious identity by blending elements of their respective cultures, giving birth to the

One of the most impressive pictures in the book can be found on page 15, a portrait of Father<sup>8</sup> Euclides from the day he was consecrated as guest of honor of the Avimadjenon upon a restricted ritual in Ouidah, Benin. On the following page there is an excerpt from the book *Itan de dois terreiros*, written by Father Euclides himself, where he speaks about the dream he had been cherishing for a long time: visiting Africa. He also mentions his emotional tie to priest Dah Daagbo Avimadjenon Ahouandjinou, a man he hadn't met yet. By an artistic residency<sup>9</sup> then, the project Pedra da Memória fulfilled that dream, arranging for both masters to meet.

Over the course of five weeks, Renata Amaral, Brice Sogbossi (a Beninese anthropologist established in Brazil), Father Euclides and two other members of House Fanti Ashanti – iyakekerê Isabel Onsemanwvi and ogan Carlos – visited the cities of Cotonou, Abomey, Ketou, Porto Novo, Ouidah, Allada, Pobe and Sakete. This project, from which this book is a part of, is the result of their time in Benin and six additional weeks spent at House Fanti Ashanti in Maranhão. There was also a contribution from Renata Amaral's own archive, built over the course of her experience with audio-visual studies focused on folk culture from different Brazilian states.

From page 120 onwards, the pictures give room for words. They assume a supporting role to the text narrated in first person where Euclides Talabyan's memories are revealed. His delicate memories conduct us through paths that go as far back as his first years, his childhood and initiation into Candomblé, uncovering stories from old terreiros,<sup>10</sup> and the history of House Fanti Ashanti's formation, along with its connection to the city of São Luís and the many popular festivities in Maranhão. A few pages ahead, pictures taken by a commission organized by Mario de Andrade in 1938<sup>11</sup> to research Brazilian folklore are added for the same effect of remembrance.<sup>12</sup>

In this book, image and word seem to be intertwined through the pages in the pursuit of an ancestral memory. On the preface to the book, Walter Garcia, a musician and teacher, warns us: “in a religion connected

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jejê-nagô Candomblé. For more information, see João Ferreira Dias (2016).

8. See note 6.

9. Prêmio Interações Estéticas award by Funarte.

10. Candomblé temples are called terreiros (yards).

11. The delegation organized for the research on folklore was organized by Mário de Andrade when he was the head of the Department of Culture of São Paulo (<http://centrocultural.sp.gov.br/site/desfrute/colecoes/missao-de-pesquisas-folcloricas/>).

12. According to Renata Amaral (2013, 221): “Father Euclides, despite being one year old by the time of this documentation, had a very direct relation with Terreiro Féem Deus, from the priest Maximiniana Silva, which was registered by the commission in 1938. His aunt, who was also a motherly figure, Isaura was a dancer from this Terreiro. Therefore, he used to visit the place when he was a baby, growing up with its people. Out of the 20 people registered by the commission, he recognized all but three”.

**TRANSLATION**  
Lindolfo Sancho

to ancestry, memory is the core of knowledge” and he adds: “the resistance of the stone is greater when its solidity, whilst remaining compact, manages to become permeable”. Therefore, at first, the way the pictures are organized suggests a more permeable path that gives rise to free and loose associations between the expressions, dances, and rites here in Brazil and there in Africa as an expression of a shared ancestry. On the other hand, the text on the second part of the book being mediated and activated by images from archives, bring about the weight of memories that carry a personal history. Individual and collective unite along these paths where words and images are intertwined, leaving a feeling that Father Euclides, by attending the university of the Time (as he used to say he did), has learned how to be like a rock.

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